

Are we too mission focused?

By Maj. Scott Tobin
8th Communications Squadron commander

I knew the title would raise a few eyebrows, so I'll get back to that in a second.

When they asked if I'd write an article for the base paper, I said yes of course. I did ask, however, what the topic should be.

"Anything you'd like to talk about" was the guidance I was given. So with that open freedom, I thought for a couple days about what I could say that hadn't already been said, and potentially more than once.

I thought about reflecting on how many people wrongly said Kunsan would be a lousy place to be stationed, but obviously the Wolf already covers that in his welcome speeches to the Patriot arrivals each week. I also thought about discussing how terribly inappropriate the comments were the comedian made last week about Korean people and the culture here. As I'm sure most of you have found by now, the Koreans are extremely humble, generous and polite people.

That was an ugly evening in my opinion, and I know there were a lot of uncomfortable people who couldn't have disagreed more with his disparaging comments and disturbing threats. So even though I could have elaborated on that, I finally came up with the one that really hit home.

I remember thinking back to what the Wolf said at our officers' call he held a few weeks ago, when he talked about some of the problems we've been experiencing around base. He cited several specific examples and asked us how we felt we could fix them. Then he rhetorically asked if our problems might be a result of us losing our mission focus. So I thought about that and began to ask the question if it might be a result of just the opposite – the only focus we have is the mission, and anything not tied to putting planes in the air or bombs on target may be considered secondary.

In the short time I've been here, I've noticed a pervasive "tactical" mentality. Essentially, anything is acceptable as long as it's functional and can perform the mission. I've seen that before in tactical deployments, particularly when you're start-

ing from scratch.

No doubt, part of that mindset here is due to the high turnover of personnel. Folks are motivated to see completion in their projects so they potentially hurry through them to get them done. We're also constantly pressured with the thought, "We might have to fight tonight," so there's additional pressure to get things done.

Consequently, as you drive around the base, you see things here you don't normally see at stateside bases. Seldom do you see runs of concertina wire at a stateside base that may or may not have any purpose; nor do you typically see things connected with semi-permanent extension cords rather than being properly wired; nor sandbags that have long since ruptured and are now useless; nor wires running along walls or fence tops that may or may not still be connected to anything. We commonly hear about this being the "land of not quite right." It appears we may have lulled ourselves into thinking this is the base of "not quite perfect." I haven't seen any other base where we would accept these things – why here?

We talk about ownership and the need to take a personal interest in "our" base, but have we? I'd certainly say there's an awful lot of trash around the base that isn't being picked up by anyone, and it's in plain site near well-traveled routes – we need to pick it up. We wouldn't track mud into our houses back home, but we certainly do here – I guess that's because it's some one else's job to clean up. And what about our relaxed enforcement of personal dress and appearance? No one admits to the standards being any different here, but most agree that we don't enforce them. It's not uncommon to see Air Force members walking around without hats or wearing body jewelry while off duty.

So are we "too" mission focused? Of course not – I hope there's no such thing.

We're at the tip of the spear where we should all want to be, and to lose any perspective on the criticality of our mission could be tragic. I only hope we can realize that failing to maintain vigilance on the other aspects of our job can ultimately have the same effects if they seep into our "real" missions.

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Thinking about writing a commentary for the paper? Here are some guidelines to consider:

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Report with factual and objective information. Avoid morbid, sensational or alarming details not necessary to factual reporting.

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Col. Burt Field
8th Fighter Wing commander

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